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ABSTRACT

In Japanese society, it is inevitable to use polite expressions in public. Adult Japanese must use polite expressions whenever they meet anybody for the first time. Hence, it is possible to say that all adult Japanese know the usage of politeness vaguely, but not clearly. It is because they learn it through socializing with others. An examination of the English usage of politeness helps to make politeness in Japanese a bit clearer, especially in light of G. N. Leech's theories about politeness. Leech proposes several maxims related to his revision of Grice's Cooperative Principle: (1) tact; (2) generosity; (3) approbation; (4) modesty; (5) agreement; and (6) sympathy. A detailed description of these maxims clarifies both their value and shortcomings. Some scholars feel that Leech has not been forthcoming in describing the process by which he arrived at these maxims and has not been clear about how they are connected. In addition, it may be that his maxims do not capture Japanese usage in any purposeful way. Japanese tend to observe approbation, modesty, and agreement over the other maxims because of their social customs and expectations. (TB)

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ED 403 618

Critical review of Leech's (1983) proposal about politeness

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Introduction

In Japanese society, it is inevitable to use polite expressions in public. Adult Japanese people must use polite expressions whenever they meet anybody for the first time. Hence, it is possible to say that all adult Japanese know the usage of politeness vaguely, but not clearly. It is because they learn it through socialising with others.

In this paper, I will make the usage of politeness in Japanese a bit clearer through studying the English usage of politeness, in particular, I will assess Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle (PP) and maxims.

The first section will briefly introduce Leech's (1983) proposal about politeness. The second section will describe his six maxims and point out some problems of these maxims in English speaking society, and then, will suggest some problems when Japanese people observe them. The third section will discuss other problems and the fourth section will suggest how well his categories capture the usage in Japanese. The fifth section will make it clear which maxims Japanese people favourably observe, and the final section will conclude the previous discussions.

Leech's (1983) proposal about politeness.

According to Leech (1983), Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) is necessary and helps to account for the relation between what an utterance means in a particular context and what a speaker (S) intends to mean (H) in a particular conversation. However, he admits that Grice's CP has some problems as follows;

> the CP in itself cannot explain a) why people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean, and b) what is the relation between sense and force when non-declarative types of sentence are being considered. (1983, p. 80)

He (1983, chap 4) proposes PP in order to solve these problems. It is defined as follows;

> Minimize (other things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs.
> Maximize (other things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs.

He (1983, chap 6) also proposes several maxims which are related to the PP. The main maxims are Tact and Generosity Maxims which are related to S's/H's cost/benefit, Approbation and Modesty Maxims which are related to S's/H's dispraise/praise, Agreement Maxim which is related to S's/H's disagreement/agreement, and Sympathy Maxim which is related to S's/H's antipathy/sympathy.

The next section will describe his PP and six maxims, and discuss some problems especially for Japanese people.

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TACT MAXIM

(a) Minimize cost to other [(b) Maximize benefit to other] (Leech, 1983, p. 132)

In this Maxim, he introduces five kinds of scales which are relevant to politeness; 1) the cost-benefit scale, 2) optionality scale, 3) the indirectness, 4) authority scale, and 5) social distance scale. In these scales, there are some problems.

Firstly, it is very difficult to understand that the cost-benefit scale is useful to understand the degree of politeness. He points out in his examples that if a S uses a direct form (e.g. imperative), [1] is more polite than [2] (other factors being equal)

[1] Have another sandwich.

[2] Peel these potatoes.

(examples from Leech, 1983, p. 107)

However, it seems very difficult for me to understand that [1] is more polite than [2]. It is because, at first, Japanese people (including me) can not use the imperative form if we imply politeness. It is, of course, possible to think that [1] benefits H, and [2] costs H, therefore, the cost-benefit scale indicates that [1] is more polite than [2]. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the cost/benefit factor has nothing to do with politeness in Japanese society. If S utters [1] to H in Japanese society, H may just thank S for offering H another sandwich, and think that S is KIND, but never thinks that S is POLITE.

In order to explain this strong contrast with English, it is useful to explain fundamental Japanese thought towards politeness. Hill et al. (1986) introduce this thought which is called "wakimae" in Japanese (discernment in English) as follows;

> wakimae refers to the almost automatic observation of socially-argued-upon rules and applies to both verbal and non-verbal behaviour. (1986, p. 348)

S is normally required to select an appropriate linguistic form and/or appropriate behaviour according to some factors of H and situation. According to Hill et al., this selection is the "passive" (p. 348) one. They also point out the "active choice" (p. 348); it is chosen by S's intention to imply a certain implicature to H, called "Volition". (p. 348)

Judging from the "wakimae"(discernment) concept, Japanese people tend to think that imperative form should be avoided and an indirect form should be used if S means politeness to H. Therefore, it is impossible to think [1] is more polite than [2]. In other words, both [1] and [2] imply impoliteness to H.

Secondly, Leech does not mention the hierarchy of these five scales. It seems acceptable (other things being equal) if each scale is used separately. However, it sometimes happens that more than one scale is required to understand the degree of politeness;

It is a very hot day and both S and H feel hot in the room.

[3] Would you mind opening the window?

[4] Shall I open the window?

In these two examples, at least 2 kinds of scales are required to understand the degree of politeness; cost-benefit scale and indirectness scale, and it is possible to illustrate as follows;

1. [3] costs more to H than [4] according to cost-benefit scale

⇓

∴ [4] is more polite than [3]

2. In [3], S uses greater indirectness than [4] according to indirectness scale

⇓

∴ [3] is more polite than [4]

In this case, it is impossible to know which utterance is more polite, [3] or [4].

Consequently, it is possible to say that this maxim can function within the PP in English society. However, if more than one scale is used in an utterance, it is unclear how to decide the degree of politeness. Further, in Japanese society, this maxim cannot function within the PP unless an utterance is minimised or some indirect forms added.

GENEROSITY MAXIM

(a) Minimize benefit to self [(b) Maximize cost to self] (Leech, 1983, p. 132)

Like Tact Maxim, Generosity Maxim is related to the cost/benefit factor. Hence, Japanese people do not recognise this maxim as politeness unless this cost/benefit factor is minimised or some indirect forms added;

[5] You can lend me £10. (impolite)

||

Japanese: Boku-ni 10 pondo kashite-kureru-ne.(implies threat)

[6] I can lend you £10. (polite)

||

Japanese: Kimi-ni 10 pondo kashite ageru-yo. (implies kindness)

[7] If you do not mind shall I lend you £10? (polite)

||

Japanese: Moshi yokattara kimini-ni 10 pondo kashite age-you-ka. (implies offer, or politeness)

It is clear that [5] implies benefit to S, hence, [5] violates the Generosity Maxim in English. On the other hand, in Japanese, normally [5] implies threat to H. In [6], S implies cost to S, hence, it is possible to think that [6] implies politeness to H in English. However, in Japanese, [6] implies just kindness to H, as I mentioned in the previous part. Hence, [6] does not imply politeness to H. However, even in Japanese, [7] can imply politeness to H if S and H are close friends ,and can imply an offer to H as well. Therefore, as well as the Tact Maxim, the Generosity Maxim is not recognised as politeness unless S minimises benefit/cost to self, or S uses indirectness.

APPROBATION MAXIM

(a) Mimimize dispraise of other [(b) Maximize praise of other] (Leech, 1983, p. 132)

This maxim is very popular among Japanese people. As Leech comments, this maxim includes "flattery" (p. 135) and it is generally reserved for "insincere approbation" (p. 135). For example, A's presentation is very good. A is a close friend of B.

[8] B: Your presentation is very good. Well done! (approbation)

||

Japanese: Kimi-no happyoo-wa totemo subarashi-katta-yo. Yoku yattane.

(approbation)

A: Thank you. = Japanese: Arigatou.

In [8], B complements A's performance sincerely, and A thanks B and is pleased to hear that. However, A's utterance violates the Modesty Maxim - this will be discussed in the next part.

In another situation, A is a close friend of B. One day, A was invited to B's house where B's wife and B's son (5 years old) lived with B. A looked at B's son and said "Hello", but he said nothing. A thought that he was not taught manners by his parents, and got a little bit angry with B's son, but said;

[9] A: Oh! How cute your son is! (approbation)

||

Japanese: Maa! Nante kawaii musuko-san nanodeshou! (approbation)

B: No, no, he is a stupid boy.

||

Japanese: Ie ie aitsu-wa bakana musuko-deshite.

In this example, A maximises praise of B's son, but it is clear that A flatters B, because A does not think that B's son is cute. On the other hand, B denies A's utterance and B dispraises B's son.

There are plenty of examples observing this maxim in Japanese society, in particular, in an adult society.

MODESTY MAXIM

(a) Minimize praise of self [(b) Maximize dispraise of self] (Leech, 1983, p. 132)

In Japanese society, this maxim is also very popular and is used more frequently than in English-speaking society. For example, A is a friend of B. A made an appointment to visit B's house and went there. B's house was very new and clean. A brought a bottle of Japanese-sake (alcohol);

[10] A: Hello! = Japanese: Konnichiwa!

B: Hello. You look good. Every room is untidy, but please come in. (1)

||

Japanese: Konnichiwa. Genki soude. Heya-wa mina chirakatte-masu ga douzo o-hairi kudasai.

A: Excuse me.= Japanese: O-jama shimasu. (a)

This is a gift which will be no use to you, but please take it. (b)

||

Japanese: Tsumaranai mono desu ga douzo.

B: Oh, no, I can not take such a good gift. (2)

||

Japanese: Maa sonna mono ii-desu yo.

A: Please take it. = Japanese: Sonna koto iwazuni douzo.

B: Really? Thank you. = Japanese: Soukai? Arigatou.

In this example, A observes the Modesty Maxim twice, (a) and (b). a) implies maximised dispraise of A's self, as if A were not permitted to visit B's house. b) also implies maximised dispraise of A's self rather than minimising praise of A's self; such as A brought a useless gift. On the other hand, B also observes the Modesty Maxim twice, (1) and (2). (1) implies extremely minimised praise of B's self even though B's house is new and very clean. (2) implies maximising dispraise of B's self; such as B is not as respectable a person as to get a gift from B.

Like this example, even between friends, people always observe the Modesty Maxim. In particular, it seems to me that this maxim is regarded as "wakimae" (discernment) in Japanese society. However, there is a disagreement between Leech's Modesty Maxim and the Japanese "wakimae" concept. In the Modesty Maxim, Leech comments on the sub-maxim that "sub-maxim (b) seems to be less important than sub-maxim (a)" (1983, p. 133) However, in Japanese society, sub-maxim (b) is also very important, and is used frequently like [10]. Hence, in this maxim, both sub-maxims, (a) and (b) are equally important in Japanese society.

AGREEMENT MAXIM

(a) Mimimize disagreement between self and other [(b) Maximize agreement between self and other] Leech (1983, p. 138)

Although Leech (1983, p. 138) comments that there are not so many examples in this maxim, there are many examples in Japanese society. In particular, when authority or social distance between S and H is different, this maxim is often observed. For example;

A is a friend of B, but A is 24 years old, and B is 31 years old. A was busy at that time in writing an essay.

[11] B: Shall we go to a movie tonight?
||
Japanese: Konban eiga demo ikou-ka?

A: Well Yes, it is OK.
||
Japanese: Ee...iidesu-yo.

[12]: relationship between A and B is the same as in [11]

B: This movie is very fantastic, isn't it?
||
Japanese: Kono eiga totemo yokatta-ne.

A: Yes, but I think that it was a little bit boring in the last part.
||
Japanese: Ee, demo saigo-ga chotto tsumaranakatta-desu-ne.

[13] A is a friend of B. Both A and B are the same age. Both A and B will be free tomorrow.

A: How about going to Blackpool tomorrow?

||

Japanese: Ashita burakkupuuru e ikanai-ka?

B: Yes, of course. = Japanese: Un mochiron.

Although Leech (1983, p. 138) comments that "there is a tendency to exaggerate agreement with other people", it does not seem true in Japanese society. In [13], B agrees with A, but B does not exaggerate agreement with A. Rather, in Japanese society, there seems to be greater tendency to mitigate or minimise disagreement like [12], or further, to deny one's opinion and try to agree with other people like [11]. The latter case can happen when either S or H has higher authority than the other, or when there is a social distance between S and H.

Hence, it seems to me that the Agreement Maxim is not a minor maxim, but a major maxim, as well as the Approbation Maxim or the Modesty Maxim in Japanese society.

SYMPATHY MAXIM

(a) Minimize antipathy between self and other [(b) Maximize sympathy between self and other] (Leech, 1983, p. 139)

It seems to me that this maxim does not apply in every situation. It is true that Leech (1983) gives some examples in this maxim, but these examples can only explain the sub-maxim (b) and he comments himself that this sub-maxim is less important. In order to observe the sub-maxim (a), it might be possible to say as follows;

[13] Can't you get out of here? = Japanese: Kokokara dete ikenai to iunoka?

[14] Would you shut up? = Japanese: Shizukani shite-itadakemasen-ka?

However, [13] can imply an order or threat to H rather than politeness, in particular, it is impossible to interpret that [13] implies politeness to H in Japanese. On the other hand, [14] can not imply a feeling of antipathy, but imply an offer to H. Hence, it seems impossible to interpret whether [14] mitigates antipathy or not.

Therefore, it seems to me that this maxim only applies in the particular situation such as "congratulation" or "condolence" (Leech 1983, p. 139) that observes only the sub-maxim (b), and consequently, it seems impossible to treat this maxim with the same status as the other Approbation, Modesty, and the Agreement Maxims.

In this section, I have discussed Leech's (1983) six maxims in turn, and some problems have arisen. In the next section, I will discuss some other problems of Leech's (1983) PP and six maxims.

Other problems of Leech's PP and Maxims.

Leech's (1983) PP and maxims have been argued about by several researchers (Dillon et al. 1985, Brown and Levinson 1987, Fraser 1990).

The main problem that they have thought is how Leech has invented these maxims. It is true that Leech has defined the PP and invented six maxims which are related to it. Further, he has invented other principles, such as the Irony Principle, Banter Principle,

Interest Principle, and Pollyanna Principle. However, he has not adequately explained the relationship between these principles. For example, the Irony Principle is explained when the CP and PP is violated, the Interest Principle comes into play according to his discussion (1983), and he explains it with the following example.

[15] A: We'll all miss Bill and Agatha, won't we?
B: Well, we'll all miss Bill.

(example is from Leech 1983, p. 81)

According to Leech, in this example, B's utterance violates the Quantity Maxim of Gricean CP, because B does not fully answer A's question about Agatha. Further, B's utterance is impolite to Agatha. It means that B violates PP as well. So far, his explanation is acceptable to me even though it is arguable[1] . He concludes, then, that this example implies irony to H and observes the Irony Principle. However, he does not explain why this example implies irony to H. Therefore, further explanation of the relationship between all of the Principles and Maxims will be required.

principles and maxims. Hence, it is questionable how he classifies his principles and maxims, and it is not clear whether he classifies his principles and maxims systematically or not.

Secondly, as I mentioned in the previous section, the Sympathy Maxim seems to be idiosyncratic, because he only mentions two situations (congratulation, condolence) and he does not give any examples of sub-maxim (a). Hence, it is doubtful whether he analyses this maxim sufficiently or not.

How well do Leech's categories capture the usage in Japanese?

As I mentioned in the previous section, it seems to me that Leech's (1983) PP does not capture well the usage in Japanese. In order to explain this reason, at first, it is

A SCHEME OF STRATEGIES FOR LINGUISTIC POLITENESS

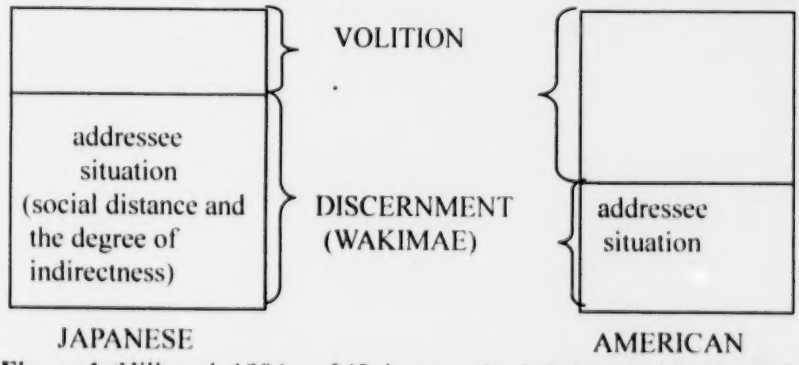

Figure 1 (Hill et al. 1986, p. 348, in parenthesis is inverted by the author)

1. Dillon et al. (1985) argues that Leech's interpretation is problematic and indicates that [15] implies impoliteness not to Agatha, but to A, and B's utterance must be taken as a CORRECTION of A's utterance.

necessary to think about the difference in the degree of "wakimae" (discernment) between Japanese and other society. Figure 1 shows the example of difference in the degree of "wakimae" (discernment) between Japanese and American society;
In Japanese society, WAKIMAE concept predominates over the VOLITION in the use of politeness in the Japanese language. In contrast, in American society, VOLITION predominates over DISCERNMENT in the polite use of the American English language. Hence, the Japanese speaker has fewer opportunities to change the degree of politeness according to his/her intention than the American speaker. Further, it seems to me that the social distance between S and H, and the degree of indirectness are also included in Japanese WAKIMAE. Hence, it seems difficult not to follow these two factors. In other words, it seems difficult to use a direct sentence if S tries to imply some degree of politeness to H.

Secondly, it seems to me that the Tact and Generosity Maxims do not capture anything of the usage in Japanese. As I mentioned before, Japanese people tend to recognise that minimising/maximising the cost/benefit to others is not a politeness, but a kindness.

For example, A is a friend of B and A was invited to B's house for dinner.

[16] B: Have another glass or wine. = Japanese: wain-wo mouippai nominasai.
A: Thank you. = Japanese: arigatou
[17] B: Will you want another glass or wine?

Japanese: wain-wo mouippai nomima-sen-ka?
A: Yes, certainly! = Japanese: yorokonde.

Japanese people tend to think that B's utterance in [16] just implies kindness, not politeness to A, while B's utterance in [17] implies not only kindness, but politeness to A.

Therefore, Japanese people tend to recognise politeness by the use of indirectness.

Which Maxims do tend to be favoured by Japanese people?

As I mentioned before, it is clear that Japanese people tend to observe the Approbation, Modesty, and Agreement Maxim rather than the other maxims. It seems to me that the reason why they prefer these maxims emerges from their social rules.

Firstly, in Japan, since early times, it has been recognised as a model how a person of virtue (e.g. a monk) behaved or spoke. It has been said that a monk never praised himself, but always praised others, and never denied directly other people's opinions or thoughts. Hence, people followed the monk's behaviour and linguistic form, and wanted to be like him/her in a future. Recently, fewer people have tried to be like a monk than before, but the behaviour and linguistic form still remains as a social norm.

Secondly, the Japanese WAKIMAE concept seems to have been influenced by Confucianism in ancient China. In Confucianism, there was a norm of respect to others, in particular, elder people. Many Japanese people had followed the norm of Confucianism at that time. Although Confucianism itself has disappeared these days, it's norms still remain in Japanese people's mind.

Consequently, it is true that a Japanese monk's behaviour/linguistic form and Confucianism have influenced Japanese people, and even now, they tend to favour the Approbation, Modesty, and Agreement Maxims, and tend to use more indirect form

than English-speaking people.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have focused on Leech's (1983) PP and six maxims, and suggested some problems, in particular, his way of classifying these maxims and principles. In Japanese society, it has been cleared that the WAKIMAE concept was a very important factor to understand the usage of politeness. From this concept, Japanese people's tendency of observing maxims has emerged.

Of course further discussion about his principles and maxims are required, but it seem to me that his principles and maxims are only partly supported by other researchers. Hence, when people adopt Leech's (1983) idea, they have to be aware of some problems that his idea has.

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